LETTERS

TO A

MEMBER

OF THE

PRESENT PARLIAMENT,

UPON THE EXTRAORDINARY AND

UNPRECEDENTED TRANSACTIONS

IN THE LAST

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

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LETTERS

A

MEMBER

OF THE

PRESENT PARLIAMENT,

TO HIS

CONSTITUENTS.

LETTERS,

&c. &c. &c.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

IT has given me great ſatisfaction to find that you are elected a member of the new Parliament. That perſons of an independant fortune, and who have been at pains to improve the advantages of a liberal education, ſhould early acquire a knowledge of our Conſtitution, and take an active part in the government, is devoutly to be wiſhed by every lover of his country. Give me leave to ſay, that your promiſing abilities, and the ſpirit you have hitherto diſcovered, encourage me to hope that, in the ſituation in which you are now placed, your conduct will be ſuch as to reflect

honor upon yourſelf and your connections. You are, indeed, beginning your political career at a very critical period; when the proceedings of Parliament are likely to draw the attention of all Europe, and when its reſolutions will not only aſcertain deciſively the character of its members, but probably determine the fate of a Conſtitution, which has long been the boaſt of Engliſhmen, as well as the admiration and envy of their neighbours. The deſire you expreſs of knowing my opinion, concerning the ſtate of our public affairs, is highly flattering to me; and I ſhall take the liberty of communicating, without reſerve, ſuch thoughts as I am unable to ſuppreſs on the preſent alarming criſis.

In order to form a right judgment of the ſeveral queſtions which are now likely to be agitated, it ſeems neceſſary that you ſhould take a retroſpective view of the public occurrences for ſeveral months paſt, and examine the courſe of events which has led to the diſſolution of the former, and given birth to the preſent Parliament. Permit me, therefore, to recall to your memory a few of thoſe particulars, from which the conduct of the different parties, the principles upon which they have acted, and the deſigns which they are proſecuting, will appear in the fulleſt light.

In a review of this kind, the extraordinary circumſtances attending the late change of Miniſtry,

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as they afford a key to the ſucceeding tranſactions, appear to demand your firſt attention. The interference of the Crown, with all its weight, to influence the determination of an important queſtion then depending in the Houſe of Peers, was undoubtedly an unconſtitutional meaſure of the firſt magnitude. The vehement manner in which this was executed, the direct and even threatening intimation that was given concerning the inclinations of Majeſty, leave no doubt about the intention of the meaſure: The ſucceſs which attended it, renders its conſequences truly alarming.

That the King, during the dependance of a bill, ſhall not take notice of the proceedings of either Houſe, is a maxim obviouſly founded upon the ſeparate departments belonging to the different branches of the Legiſlature, and which is manifeſtly eſſential to the freedom of debate, and to the independance of Parliament. There is accordingly no point, with reſpect to which parliament has been more watchful of its privileges, or has diſcovered greater jealouſy of whatever might have the appearance of the leaſt encroachment upon the part of the Crown *. The flagrant violation of

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* See the proceedings of the Houſe of Commons collected by Hatſell. This author mentions two exceptions to the maxim above-mentioned. The firſt where the King is intereſted

parliamentary privileges, in this particular, has always been regarded as an indelible ſtain upon the otherwiſe fortunate and glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth: And it was a meaſure of the ſame ſort which marked, in ſtrong characters, the diſſimulation and tyrannical principles of the infatuated Charles the Firſt.

I fancy you will agree with me in thinking, that the appointment of the preſent Miniſters was not ſo properly a *conſequence*, as it was a *part* of the late tranſaction which I have mentioned. There can be no doubt that the whole plan was laid with their advice and concurrence; that they approved of it in all its branches, and that their coming into office, was a neceſſary and preconcerted link in the ſcheme. It cannot therefore be denied, that they are reſponſible for this, as well as for every ſucceeding meaſure of the Crown.

The reſolutions of the Houſe of Commons, which followed this tranſaction, were ſuch as the circumſtances of the caſe loudly demanded. Had the repreſentatives of the nation allowed themſelves to wink at ſuch extraordinary proceedings, or paſſed them over in ſilence, they would have been juſtly conſidered as callous to every inſult upon

terected as a party, having a pecuniary intereſt. The ſecond, on applications for public money. It will not, ſurely, be pretended that the late interference of the Crown, falls within either of theſe exceptions.

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their own dignity, as betraying the truſt repoſed in them by their Conſtituents, and as tamely abandoning the moſt important rights of the people.

It was not poſſible, at the ſame time, to condemn theſe proceedings, without cenſuring the perſons who had been chiefly inſtrumental in the execution of them. It was not poſſible to condemn the crime, and with the ſame breath to approve of the criminal; far leſs to cheriſh and reward him, or to employ him in thoſe important departments which require the higheſt national confidence.

The ſtrong cenſures expreſſed by the Houſe of Commons againſt the adviſers of this meaſure, and the repeated addreſſes which they carried to the Throne, for the removal of the preſent Miniſtry, have given riſe to a queſtion the moſt important, perhaps, of any that can be agitated with reſpect to the Britiſh Conſtitution. That the Crown has the ſole right of naming its Miniſters, is indiſputable. But is this right to be exerciſed, in all caſes, without any ſort of limitation or controul? Is it not neceſſary that Miniſters ſhall have the confidence of Parliament? in particular, that they ſhall have the confidence of the Houſe of Commons, by whom the ſupplies are granted, and committed to the immediate direction of Miniſtry? And if the Repreſentatives of the nation ſhall entertain a ſuſpicion, from whatever cauſe, of the perſons appointed by the Crown for that purpoſe, and ſhall

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think them unfit for the truſt committed to them, is it not the duty of the executive power to remove them from their offices? This is a queſtion which every Engliſhman ought ſeriouſly to conſider; as it involves, not the intereſt of this or that political party, but the deareſt and moſt important rights of the nation. The determination of this point appears to me to decide, whether we are to remain in the condition of a free people, or to be reduced under an abſolute government.

According to the ſyſtem of government eſtabliſhed at the Revolution, by which a proper line was drawn between the prerogative of the Crown and the privileges of the People, the Legiſlative power, including that of impoſing taxes, was veſted in the three branches of parliament; and it was underſtood that, in conformity to the ancient Conſtitution, the particular ſhare of the Legiſlature, committed to the Crown, ſhould be exerciſed, in the way of a *negative* only, to ſuch bills as might be paſſed in the two Houſes. Such was the diſtribution of the pre-eminent and controuling power in the State, which, at that glorious æra of our hiſtory, received the ſanction of public authority, and was intended to remain inviolable to future ages. The ſettlement, which was made at that period, is to be conſidered as the great ſtandard, for aſcertaining the nature of our limited monarchy. It is the fixed ſtar which we, of this iſland, ought

ought never to loſe ſight of in all the mazes of political ſpeculation. The rights of the Sovereign and of the people were then balanced with ſuch peculiar propriety, that no ſuperiority of power could afterwards be acquired by either party, without being fatal to that mixed form of government which it had been the general intention to ſecure.

The natural courſe of things, however, and the almoſt unavoidable modes of conducting public buſineſs, have, ſince that period, produced conſiderable deviations from the ſtrict form of the Revolution ſettlement: but theſe deviations have been invariably of ſuch a nature as to preſerve the ſpirit and the eſſence of that happy eſtabliſhment. If any new powers have been aſſumed by one party, which might ſeem an incroachment upon the rights of the other, theſe have been counterbalanced by a direliction of other powers, or by the exerciſe of privileges upon the other ſide, from which the general equilibrium has been maintained, and the ſyſtem of our liberties has remained upon its former baſis.

Thus the unqueſtionable prerogative of refuſing the Royal aſſent to bills which have paſſed the two Houſes of Parliament, appears to be in a great meaſure relinquiſhed; ſince only one inſtance of its exertion is to be found from the period above-mentioned; that is, during the courſe

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of near a century. On the other hand, the Crown has, during the ſame courſe of time, been accuſtomed to the regular exerciſe of another branch of power, in reality of much greater conſequence; that of *introducing*, by its Miniſters, the greater part of bills which come under the deliberation of Parliament. It is now regarded as a ſingularity, when debates of a public nature, and in matters of importance, originate from a different quarter. In place of a mere negative, in the laſt inſtance, upon the reſolutions of that aſſembly, the Crown has thus acquired the means of ſuggeſting every ſubject of deliberation. Inſtead of interpoſing a reſtraint upon any innovation, it has in this manner become the prime mover of new regulations. From furniſhing merely the ballaſt, it now fills the ſails of the veſſel.

This however is not the only alteration which time has introduced in the partition of the great powers of government. It is well known that in ordinary caſes, the miniſtry are accuſtomed, not only to *bring in*, but to *carry through*, thoſe bills which are agreeable to the wiſhes of the Crown. The influence derived from the management of the public revenue, and from the various expedients in the hands of the Crown, is ſuch as commonly to ſecure the ſucceſs of every new regulation propoſed by the Court, and to render

render the public deliberation little more than a matter of form. There are ſeldom wanting, indeed, combinations of individuals, who endeavour to oppoſe the meaſures of Adminiſtration; but the efforts of thoſe men, in ordinary ſituations, have uſually no other conſequence than to afford the entertainment of a debate, or at moſt to occaſion a little delay of the buſineſs. That this is the real ſtate of the matter, is acknowledged by all the world; and while we reaſon upon the nature of the Britiſh Government, we are forced to admit that its operations, in this particular, are by no means performed according to thoſe general principles upon which the political machine has been conſtructed.

If what I have now obſerved were to hold univerſally, if the influence of the Crown were, in all caſes, to over-rule the determinations of Parliament, it is evident that our liberties would be at an end; and that, ſo far from maintaining the principles of the Revolution ſettlement, we ſhould be unqueſtionably under the abſolute dominion of a ſingle perſon. But in this, as in many other inſtances which occur in the hiſtory of the Engliſh government, a remedy has been quickly provided, capable of ſtopping the progreſs at leaſt, if not of compleatly curing the diſorder. From the very circumſtances which produced this irregular exertion of Crown-influence,

there has ariſen a method of controuling and limiting the extent of it, from which its dangerous conſequences appear to be in a great meaſure removed. Though, from the concurrence of ordinary cauſes, the national aſſembly is commonly induced to follow the guidance of miniſtry, yet in peculiar circumſtances a different diſpoſition may prevail; and the conduct of particular Miniſters may be ſo abſurd, or of ſuch a hurtful tendency, as to excite indignation and reſentment, or to create a general diſtruſt of their intentions. In ſuch a ſituation, it ſeems to be the duty, as it is likely to be the inclination of Parliament, not only to reject with violence the meaſures which have been preſented to their conſideration, but even to require the diſmiſſion of thoſe Miniſters who have incurred their diſpleaſure. To carry their views into execution, the Houſe of Commons may refuſe the ſupplies, and by ſuſpending the operations of Government, render it neceſſary for the Crown to comply with their requeſt.

If Parliament, on theſe extraordinary occaſions, were only to refuſe its concurrence to particular meaſures, allowing the Miniſters to remain office, ſuch a feeble teſtimony of its diſpleaſure would be of little conſequence. It would be of no avail in preventing miniſtry from acquiring the entire direction of parliamentary buſineſs. It would only

only teach them to change their ground, and to vary their method of attack; or to wait for particular conjunctures in order to accompliſh a favourite meaſure. As the ſituations when a majority in either Houſe can be formed in oppoſition to Adminiſtration occur but ſeldom, they muſt be employed, as often as they do occur, for the purpoſe of reſtraining effectually the improper exertions of the executive power. They muſt be conſidered equally in the light of a check to the paſt, and of an example to the future. To render the ſervants of the Crown cautious of abuſing that extraordinary influence of which they are poſſeſſed, they muſt be convinced that it is impoſſible for them to retain their ſtations any longer than while they maintain the approbation and good opinion of Parliament. In ſhort, as the Crown has manifeſtly encroached upon the free exerciſe of the Legiſlature, it is neceſſary that the legiſlative body, in order to preſerve its independence, ſhould make a correſponding extenſion of its privileges; and as Parliament ſubmits in ordinary caſes to be directed by Adminiſtration, the miniſtry ought on the other hand to poſſeſs the confidence of Parliament, and to be removed whenever they fall into a contrary ſituation. It is in this manner only, that the exertions of prerogative which I have mentioned, can be rendered conſiſtent with any rational plan for ſecur-

ing the liberties of the people; and that the ancient balance of the conſtitution, notwithſtanding the various materials which have been accidentally thrown into either ſcale, can in reality be maintained.

The right of Parliament, and in particular the right of the Houſe of Commons, to procure, by an Addreſs to the Crown, the removal of particular Miniſters, ſeems, accordingly, to have been eſtabliſhed ever ſince the Revolution. This is the doctrine that runs through the whole courſe of our Parliamentary Debates, and which has never been controverted, even by thoſe whoſe intereſt it was to hold the oppoſite opinion. Not a ſingle inſtance occurs, during that period, in which the deſire of the Houſe of Commons in this reſpect has not been complied with; and in moſt caſes, when a Miniſter has foreſeen that an application of this kind was likely to be made againſt him, he has thought proper to retire, in order to avoid the effects of it. Even in the earlier periods of our hiſtory, we find the Parliament claiming the ſame privilege, though they had not ſo ſtrong a plea to urge in ſupport of it. The beſt and wiſeſt of our monarchs appear, at all times, to have thought it incumbent on them to remove ſuch Miniſters as had incurred the diſtruſt and jealouſy of that aſſembly; and thoſe who followed a different courſe, had, for the moſt part,

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occaſion to repent of their indiſcretion. Of the laſt, the melancholy cataſtrophe of Edward the Second, and of Richard the Second, and above all the unfortunate reigns of the Houſe of Stewart, are memorable examples.

It has been ſaid that the Addreſſes of the late Houſe of Commons, in order to procure attention from the Throne, ought to have ſpecified ſome particular miſconduct in Miniſters; and that the bare expreſſion of their diſapprobation, or want of confidence, was not ſufficient to entitle them to a compliance with their requeſt. According to my view, the reaſon ſpecified in the repeated Reſolutions of that Houſe, appears the ſtrongeſt that can poſſibly be aſſigned; an unconſtitutional meaſure of which thoſe Miniſters have been guilty in the very act which gave riſe to their appointment. Does not this tend to excite ſtronger ſuſpicions againſt their political integrity, and ſhow more clearly that they are unfit to continue in their offices, than if they had merely committed a miſtake in the conduct of a war, or had been deceived with reſpect to the productiveneſs or popularity of any particular tax, or had fallen into any of thoſe errors which are uſually inſiſted upon to juſtify an Addreſs for the removal of miniſtry?

I cannot help thinking, however, that the argument carries us a good deal farther. It appears

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to me that the Houſe of Commons have peculiarly a right to demand the removal of Miniſters, without aſſigning any ſpecific reaſon whatever. As the Houſe of Commons are entruſted by the nation at large with the power of granting ſupplies, ſo it is their duty to attend, not only to the propriety of the taxes impoſed, but alſo to the proper application of the money which is levied; and upon this account they ought, undoubtedly, to be ſatisfied of the integrity and abilities of thoſe perſons to whom the diſpoſal of the public revenue is committed. They may often be convinced, however, that particular perſons are not qualified for ſuch a truſt, and yet be unable to charge them with any ſpecific crime or miſmanagement. The unfitneſs of any perſon for an employment of ſo great difficulty and importance may often become evident before he has taken a ſingle ſtep in the execution of that employment. Is it neceſſary in ſuch a caſe, to ſuffer the actual miſmanagement of the public buſineſs, and to incur the hazard of all the evils which may ariſe from folly or wickedneſs, before a remedy ſhall be provided?

But what I would chiefly obſerve upon this head is, that if the Commons are obliged to ſpecify a reaſon for demanding a change in Adminiſtration, their privilege in this reſpect will be of

no value; as it will afford no check to the improper appointment of Miniſters. If it is held neceſſary to aſſign a ſpecific charge, in order to procure the diſmiſſion of Miniſtry, it will follow, that what is alledged againſt them muſt be of ſufficient weight; for a weak or frivolous charge ought certainly to be as little regarded as no charge at all. But who is to judge of the ſtrength or weakneſs of the reaſons which are aſſigned in ſuch caſes? Is it the Crown? That will be the ſame thing as to commit the determination of the point to the very Miniſtry themſelves, whoſe removal is propoſed. An altercation, therefore, between them and the Houſe of Commons; a paper war, in which the former will endeavour to juſtify their conduct, and the latter to repreſent it as unjuſtifiable, is all that can be expected upon ſuch a plan, whenever the Crown is diſpoſed to ſupport the appointment of its Miniſters. It were better to aboliſh at once this privilege of the Commons, than to make the people place any dependance upon ſuch a mere ſhadow of ſecurity againſt the encroachment of prerogative.

From what has now been ſuggeſted, you will be able to judge of the opinion which, I ſee, has been of late maintained by Dr. Tucker; that the only conſtitutional mode of removing our Miniſters is by an *impeachment*. I ſhall only add, that the Doctor appears not to have duly conſidered

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the ſmall proſpect of ſucceſs in impeaching Miniſters who remain in the plenitude of their power; that he has given no attention to the difficulty of proving, in a court of juſtice, thoſe crimes which, to the conviction of all the world, may have really been committed by Miniſtry; and that he has totally overlooked the neceſſity, which may frequently occur, of removing a Miniſter, on account of his incapacity, his prejudices, or his pernicious principles, when he has done nothing that could, with propriety, be made the ſubject of an impeachment*. The Athenians were ſo ſenſible of the inconveniences attending the impeachment of men high in office, that the people were permitted without any trial to paſs a vote of baniſhment upon any perſon, how innocent ſoever, who had excited

* This author has often delivered his opinion upon public meaſures; and his opinions are almoſt as various as the adminiſtrations during which he has written. He was once of opinion, that our excluſive trade with America was hurtful to the nation, and that, in ſound policy, it ought to be relinquiſhed. Upon another occaſion, however, he thought proper to juſtify the American war, upon this principle, that we had a *right* to ſubdue the Americans. Public meaſures, it ſeems, may be *legal*, which are deſtructive to the community. Change of circumſtances may, perhaps, at ſome future period, induce the Doctor to maintain, that though impeachment is the only *legal* method of removing Miniſtry, yet an addreſs to the Crown is the more *expedient* one.

excited their jealouſy, and was accounted a dangerous member of the community.

The conſiderations which I have laid before you, are ſuch as can hardly fail, I ſhould think, to ariſe in the mind of every perſon, who has had an opportunity of obſerving our late Parliamentary tranſactions. You will recollect, however, that the reflections, which we have generally met with upon that ſubject, and the views which have been held up in moſt companies, are of a very different nature. The fact is, that inſtead of bringing forward the great conſtitutional queſtion abovementioned to the examination of the people, the utmoſt pains have been taken to keep it entirely from their view; thoſe events, by which our ſyſtem of government appears to be deeply affected, have been regarded in no other light, than as they tend to promote the intereſt of different individuals; and the attention of the public, during the preſent alarming and critical period, has been artfully diverted to ſuch particular circumſtances, in the conduct of the late Miniſtry, as were calculated to excite popular clamour againſt them. The chief topics of declamation which have been employed for this purpoſe, and which appeared, for ſome time, to engroſs the attention of different ſets of people, were the *Receipt-Tax*, the *Coalition*, and the *India-Bill*. Concerning each of theſe, as the ſubject has been

much canvaſſed, it will not be difficult for you to form a deciſive opinion.

With regard to the *Receipt Tax*, it is natural to expect, that after our taxes have been ſcrewed up to ſo high a pitch, the great body of the people, who are more governed by their feelings than by reflection, and who, by their ſituation, are prevented from diſcovering the neceſſities of government, as well as the difficulty of procuring Ways and Means, ſhould be diſguſted with a new exaction, which appears to fall indiſcriminately upon a multitude of people of the lower rank, and is likely to ſtare them in the face, in the numberleſs petty tranſactions in which they are engaged. The propriety, however, and efficiency of this tax, notwithſtanding any inconveniencies which were apprehended from it, appear now to be admitted on all hands; and it has accordingly been voted for, and ſupported by both parties.—

The date of this topic of clamour is now over; and the only circumſtance relating to it, that ſeems worthy of remark, is the uncandid behaviour of that Miniſter of Finance, who, at the ſame time that he approved of the meaſure, was diſengenuous enough to conceal his ſentiments, and permitted his adherents to make the introduction of this tax a handle for caſting odium and abuſe upon the late Miniſtry.

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The coalition between Lord North and Mr. Fox has been the ſubject of ſo much diſcuſſion, that I would not wiſh to tire you with any obſervations upon it, farther than as it has been uſed by the oppoſite party, to excite popular clamour againſt the perſons concerned in that tranſaction.

When this coalition was firſt announced to the public, it no doubt excited a good deal of ſurprize in the nation. The American war had given riſe to two great parties, who approved or who diſapproved of that meaſure; and theſe were animated with much keenneſs and reſentment againſt thoſe perſons by whom the ſucceſs of that war appeared to be chiefly promoted or oppoſed;—when the American war came to an end, the ſourneſs and bad humour, contracted by the late ferment, were not immediately removed; and the different parties were ſtill eager to gratify their prevailing paſſions, by humbling the reſpective leaders of the oppoſite ſide. How ſevere and mortifying the diſapointment therefore, when Lord North and Mr. Fox, inſtead of ſuffering that diſgrace which the enemies of either had been treaſuring up for them, were brought immediately into power, and became members of a joint Adminiſtration.

The altercation at the ſame time, which had taken place betwixt thoſe different leaders, had been managed with uncommon warmth; and the oppoſition of their ſentiments had been remark-

ably pointed. The nation ſeemed, upon that account, to ſuppoſe, that the public diviſions between thoſe two perſons were to become the ſource of a private quarrel, and that the acrimony of particular expreſſions which had eſcaped them in the heat and violence of debate, was to rankle in their boſoms, and to produce a rooted perſonal animoſity. But when we reflect upon this matter with coolneſs and impartiality, it ſurely muſt be acknowledged, that there was no good ground for entertaining ſuch an opinion. Thoſe who are the fondeſt of the Britiſh Conſtitution, will, perhaps, be willing to admit, that the keenneſs of debate in Parliament which it occaſions, and the ſeverity of cenſure which it encourages againſt Adminiſtration, is a ſmall inconvenience which we derive from our happy form of government. It is a ſort of tax upon good manners, which Engliſhmen ought to conſider as the price of their freedom. But perſons who are much converſant in Parliamentary debate, learn to eſtimate the expreſſions uſed on ſuch occaſions at their juſt rate. They make allowance for the intention of the Speaker; and they acknowledge the diſtinction, according to Parliamentary language, between the imputations thrown upon political conduct, and thoſe which have a reference to private character. Indeed, without ſuch a diſtinction, it would be impoſſible to ſift, and bring to

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light, the conduct of Adminiſtration in ſuch a manner as the intereſt of the public ſeems to require.

In any other view than what is ſuggeſted by the ſuppoſition of private reſentment between thoſe two perſons, or between their reſpective adherents, their union, ſo far from deſerving cenſure, appears to merit approbation. In the circumſtances in which the coalition was made, this, or ſome other agreement, equally liable to objection, was neceſſary for carrying on the buſineſs of the nation.

The Houſe of Commons was at that time divided into three great parties, who had been diſtinguiſhed by their oppoſite opinions upon ſeveral very important ſubjects; and theſe parties were ſo equally balanced, that no one of them was capable, by itſelf, of executing public meaſures. Without a coalition between two of them, it was impoſſible to give conſiſtency and dignity to the national conduct, by forming a ſtrong and efficient Adminiſtration. But would it have been better, that Lord North ſhould have coaleſced with Lord Shelburne? or that the latter ſhould have again united with Mr. Fox, whom he had formerly abandoned? The opinions, the political connections, the perſonal altercation, the reciprocal expreſſions of reſentment or of contempt, which appeared to ſtand in the way of an union

between

between Lord Shelburne and Lord North, were at leaſt as conſpicuous as any circumſtances of a ſimilar nature which had occurred betwixt the latter and Mr. Fox. Was the character of Lord Shelburne ſuch, as to create a firmer reliance upon his profeſſions? Had he appeared leſs active and zealous, in declaiming againſt the influence of the Crown, or in turning out of office the ſupporters of the American war? Yet there is hardly any man ſo ſimple as not to be firmly perſuaded, that if Lord North had been willing to coaleſce with Lord Shelburne, he would have been received with open arms, and this coalition would have been highly extolled, and zealouſly defended, by all the friends and connections of that party, who now endeavour to repreſent the coalition with Mr. Fox in the moſt odious colours.

But the India Bill, brought in by Mr. Fox, is the great circumſtance which has given offence to a numerous and powerful deſcription of people, and which has excited them to move Heaven and Earth in order to overturn a Miniſtry, from which they dreaded the accompliſhment of a meaſure that is ſo obnoxious to them.

The diſorders that have prevailed in the government of India are of ſuch a nature, as cannot fail to awaken the compaſſion and the indignation of every man who has peruſed the authentic accounts of them, and whoſe heart is not contracted and hardened

hardened by the ſtrong, and often irreſiſtible principle of ſelf-intereſt. It is a melancholly proſpect, to behold that fertile and extenſive country, the ſeat of an ancient ſyſtem of manners and of knowledge, the reſidence of thirty millions of inhabitants, waſted and depopulated without mercy, and ſubjected to all the miſeries that can be conceived to ariſe from the lawleſs fury and rapacity of an undiſciplined, and ill regulated body of mercenaries, directed and goaded on, by the unremitting and unſatiable avarice of a ſet of merchants, or ſervants of merchants, in whom, by long habit, every other feeling but that of avarice ſeems to be totally extinct. It muſt be impoſſible, one ſhould think, for any member of the Britiſh Legiſlature to reflect, that he is, in ſome meaſure, acceſſary to theſe depredations and enormities, without experiencing very painful ſenſations, and without being diſpoſed to exert himſelf in putting a ſtop to thoſe evils. In the beginning of the preſent ſeſſion, there was accordingly an univerſal cry for a ſtrong and efficient bill, in order to correct the diſorders, and to regulate the future government of India. No palliatives, it was ſaid, by the preſent Miniſter, then in oppoſition, would be ſufficient; and nothing leſs was requiſite, than a compleat ſyſtem of regulations, ſuch as would operate a radical cure.

But when theſe were the general ſentiments expreſſed in Parliament, and throughout the nation, the Eaſt India Company were meditating ſchemes of a very different nature; and nothing could be farther from their thoughts, than to ſubmit to thoſe intended innovations. In order to form an idea of the motives and principles, by which their conduct, in this reſpect, was directed, you will pleaſe to recollect, that the Proprietors of the India Company are not to be conſidered merely in the light of a ſociety of merchants, depending for their ſupport upon the regular profits of the India trade. The regular and fair profits of that trade are now, by neglect and miſmanagement, reduced to a rate which is below the attention of a great mercantile Company. The emoluments derived from our intercourſe with that part of the world, are chiefly ſuch as ariſe from depredation; and the *form of trade*, which is ſtill kept up with the country, is little more than the mode of remitting the ſpoils which have been amaſſed by illegal violence. The Proprietors of India Stock at home are, of courſe, the real dependants of their nominal ſervants abroad. The dividends of the former depending chiefly upon the ſucceſsful rapacity of the latter, both of them are excited by the ſtrongeſt motives of intereſt, to ſtrain every nerve in promoting their common views. A great part of the India Proprietors have, in fact,

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purchaſed their ſtock for no other purpoſe, than to ſupport the intereſt of the particular ſervants of the Company abroad, with whom they are connected. To ſuch Proprietors, any effectual meaſure for regulating the government of India, muſt appear in the light of a propoſal for draining the ſources of all their wealth, as well as for annihilating their political connections; and a tame acquieſcence in ſuch a meaſure can as little be expected from them, as it can be expected from the ſervants of the Company abroad, who are fattening upon the ſpoils of India, and acquiring immenſe fortunes, by which, when imported into this country, they ſhall afterwards be enabled to ſmother any enquiry into their moſt atrocious miſdeeds.

In theſe circumſtances, it occaſions no ſurprize, that the India Bill preſented to Parliament by Mr. Fox, however well it might be calculated for repreſſing theſe diſorders, was in the higheſt degree offenſive and alarming to the India Company. The more it was likely to be effectual in promoting ſo ſalutary a purpoſe, the alarm which it excited became neceſſarily ſo much the greater. The utmoſt oppoſition, therefore, was made to it in every ſtage of its progreſs, by that numerous and powerful body of men; and the moſt outrageous and bitter invectives were poured out againſt it. When we conſider, however, the

different arguments which have been ſtated in the courſe of this oppoſition, we find that they are altogether of a ſecondary nature; that they relate, not to the tendency of the bill, with regard to its main purpoſe, the government of India, (for in this reſpect it appears to be unexceptionable) but to the effects of it upon the ſtate of the Company, and of the government at home. In this view, it has been repreſented as violating the *Chartered Rights* of the India Company, and as injurious to the *Royal Prerogative*.

As to the violation of the Chartered Rights of the Company, I can hardly perſuade myſelf that the terrors which have been held out by ſo many people, and diſplayed with ſo much parade, are to be conſidered as real. The danger of trading companies, and to corporations in general, which ſome people appear to apprehend from the interference of government in regulating the affairs of this Company, on ſuch an extraordinary emergency, I can regard in no other light than that of a mere bug-bear.

I muſt confeſs, indeed, that the reaſon, which I have ſometimes met with in converſation, for interfering in the affairs of the Company, that, by their bad behaviour, they have forfeited their rights, does not appear to me a ſatisfactory one. It does not appear that a corporation can juſtly

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be deprived of its rights, as a puniſhment for the offences committed by its managers.

But, ſurely, it will not be diſputed, that the good of the nation, and the general intereſt of ſociety, may afford a ſufficient reaſon for reſtraining and modifying the rights of any individual, as well as of any corporation whatever. That the ſtate has a right of regulating the property of all its members, with a view to the public advantage, has been univerſally admitted. It has never been doubted that Parliament may force a man to ſell his ground for the purpoſe of making a turnpike road. The law by which heritable juriſdictions in Scotland were aboliſhed, upon giving a pecuniary recompence to the perſons thus deprived of their rights, has never been arraigned, as contrary either to juſtice, or to ſound policy. Even the Sovereign of the Iſle of Man was, without any complaint, obliged, from conſiderations of public utility, to ſurrender his regal authority, and to accept of a reaſonable compenſation. The privileges of the India Company will not ſurely be looked upon as more ſacred than the common rights of property. They are privileges derived merely from the poſitive interpoſition of the Legiſlature; and the eſtabliſhment of them was, in fact, an encroachment upon the rights belonging to the other members of the community; an encroach-

ment which nothing but the conſideration of great public utility could juſtify. At the ſame time it ought to be remembered, that the pecuniary intereſt of the Company, ſo far as it ariſes from a fair trade, in conſequence of their excluſive privileges, would not, in any degree, have been hurt by the bill; but would, on the contrary, have been promoted, by turning the general attention from depredation to the ordinary profits of commerce. Nothing more was intended, than to regulate the trade and government of India, in a manner conſiſtent with the intereſt of Great Britain, with the principles of humanity, and with the unalienable rights of mankind.

2. As to what is pretended that the ſyſtem of regulation propoſed by Mr. Fox would have created a fourth eſtate independant of the Crown, you will recollect that this pretence appeared to have little weight with any perſon, during the early ſtages of the bill, though it was afterwards aſſumed with greater confidence, in order to ſerve a temporary purpoſe. The circumſtance of the *Directors* of the Company being appointed by Parliament, inſtead of being appointed by the King, cannot be thought to be of great moment, when it is conſidered, that, in either caſe, they would have been really ſuggeſted by the Miniſter. Neither would their being eſtabliſhed for a *certain period*, a circumſtance neceſſary to give energy and

and vigour to their proceedings, render them independant of the Crown; ſince by the regulation propoſed, they were to have been removeable by an addreſs from either Houſe of Parliament; and that the Crown might at pleaſure procure ſuch an addreſs, at leaſt from the Houſe of Lords, no perſon who has been attentive to recent tranſactions will be diſpoſed to queſtion.

It has indeed been argued, that, as the appointment of thoſe Directors was to proceed from the late Miniſtry, their friends would of courſe retain the government of India, independant of any future changes of Adminiſtration, and the Crown would thus find itſelf hampered and limitted in the nomination of its ſervants. This argument goes upon the ſuppoſition, that perſons who have obtained the independant poſſeſſion of an office will afterwards retain a conſtant diſpoſition to ſerve thoſe individuals to whom they are indebted for their preferment. It ſuppoſes that they will be ſo corrupted, as to make their public conduct ſubſervient to the private views of a party, and ſo virtuous, as to prefer the intereſt of their benefactor to their own, whenever the former is brought in competition with the latter. How far this ſuppoſition is conſiſtent, or how far it agrees with experience, I leave you to determine. How far the principle of private friendſhip is likely to extend in politics, I ſhall not take upon me to calculate.

calculate. But this I think may be ſaid without offence: That ſuppoſing a ſet of Directors appointed upon the plan above-mentioned, their own intereſt would concur with that of the public, in requiring that they ſhould maintain a good correſpondence with any ſet of Miniſters who might hereafter be eſtabliſhed; and I ſee no reaſon to apprehend that they would be under much temptation to ſacrifice thoſe important objects to the mere punctilio of gratitude, by the diſplay of a romantic attachment to their old benefactors *.

In all theſe articles which have been objected to the laſt Miniſtry, we have an opportunity of comparing their conduct with that of the preſent Adminiſtration. Both have approved of the Receipt Tax; but the difference lies in this, that Lord John Cavendiſh, both when he was in office and out of it, had the manlineſs to ſtand forth as the avowed ſupporter of the meaſure, wh le his ſucceſſor in office thought it neceſſary to ſculk and ſhuffle, in order to avoid an explanation of his ſentiments, and permitted his emiſſaries to load the oppoſite party with the odium of a meaſure which he himſelf ſecretly approved of. Both have produced an India Bill; but the principle which they adopted in their ſeveral bills was very diffe-

* I would by no means however be thought to degrade the ſtandard of political gratitude ſo much, as to refer you to the noted examples of Mr. R——n or Sir C—l W—y.

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rent. Mr. Fox appears to have proceeded upon the principle of public utility, and endeavoured to produce an effectual ſyſtem of regulation. Mr. Pitt ſeems to have embraced the expedient of temporiſing, and to have no farther view than of extricating himſelf from the preſent embarraſſment. He ſupported his bill chiefly by the *conſent* of the India Company, who, as might be eaſily ſuppoſed, were prevailed upon to prefer that ſyſtem which had the leaſt tendency to reſtrain the conduct of their ſervants. What proportion of the India Proprietors concurred in giving this conſent, it is needleſs to enquire; for ſurely, nothing can be more evident, than that no particular members of the Company had a right, by a voluntary ſurrender, to give up the privileges belonging to the corporation. This is a point of law that appears to have been ſufficiently underſtood as far back as the reign of Charles the Second, when the boroughs were ſo much miſled to reſign their privileges to the Crown, for the purpoſes of promoting the deſpotical views of the Court.

Laſtly, We may turn our attention to the preſent *coalition* of individuals, by whom the conduct of Lord North and Mr. Fox, in this reſpect, has been ſo much arraigned. It is not a little remarkable that Gentlemen, who have complained of this meaſure in others, ſhould have ſet an example

ample of ſo ſingular a conjunction in themſelves. Is it poſſible for the whole compaſs of nature to collect a more heterogeneous maſs of jarring elements, than go to the political compoſition of what the poverty of our language forces me to call the preſent Miniſtry. And yet they would make us expect that their union is to be productive of the public ſalvation. They have even modeſtly told us, that, from mere motives of public ſpirit, they could not think of reſigning. When we ſee Lord T——w united with Lord S—y, and Mr. D—s in a ſtrict league with Mr. P—t, we may look for ſomething extraordinary indeed———we may expect a new progeny upon the face of the earth—And perhaps it is reaſonable to conclude, that the happy time is not far off, when the wolf ſhall dandle the kid, and the ſucking child ſhall put its hand upon the den of the cockatrice.

Jam redeat virgo, *redeant Saturnia regna* —

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

MR. Fox's India Bill, mentioned in my laſt Letter, how offenſive ſoever it was to the India Company, and whatever clamour it might have excited throughout the nation, would not, in all probability, have effected a change of miniſtry, had it not been for the concurrence of another circumſtance, to which I muſt now beg leave to call your attention.

That in Great Britain the influence of the Crown has, for a long time, been gradually encreaſing, and this, from the natural courſe of things, independant of the deſigns of any particular miniſtry, is the opinion, you know, of many perſons; and for my part, I cannot help thinking that it is well founded. There are two circumſtances, reſpecting the ſtate of the nation in this particular, which I ſhall take the liberty of ſubmitting to your conſideration.

1. The prodigious increaſe of the Crown revenue, ſo far as it has ariſen from an increaſe of the number of people, by whom that revenue is ſupplied, muſt infallibly, I imagine, have extended the influence of the Crown. Suppoſe

that a State is ſo ſmall as to contain only fifty thouſand inhabitants, each of whom can afford, in taxes to government, to pay at an average twenty ſhillings; the revenue under the management of the chief magiſtrate, would, in ſuch a caſe, be the ſource of very little authority. It would probably render him very little richer than ſeveral of his moſt opulent ſubjects; and as the ſupport of his dignity would require that he ſhould live at more expence than they, he could not be expected to have any ſurplus remaining, to maintain either a military eſtabliſhment, or a numerous train of civil officers. If we ſuppoſe a nation ſo large as to contain five hundred thouſand free inhabitants, and paying taxes in the ſame proportion, the ſovereign, poſſeſſing a revenue of 500,000l. ſterling would, by the management thereof, be raiſed to proportionably greater conſideration and importance. As his income might poſſibly be ten times greater than that of any of his ſubjects, he might, after defraying the neceſſary expence of his houſehold, be in a condition to beſtow a conſiderable ſum for the mere purpoſe of creating dependance. He might maintain a ſmall body of troops, to ſerve as a kind of body guard; and he might have a variety of ſervants and retainers in the ſeveral departments of government. The authority of ſuch a Prince, however, could never be very great.

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He could never afford to hire an army that would be able to ſubdue the inhabitants, nor to gain ſuch a body of dependants as would be ſufficient to counteract thoſe combinations among his ſubjects, to which his tyranny might eaſily give occaſion.

But if a State, inſtead of containing five hundred thouſand, were to contain twenty millions of inhabitants, contributing at the ſame rate to the public revenue, it would be ſcarcely poſſible to prevent the Sovereign, who had thus the management and diſpoſal of the annual ſum of twenty millions, from eſtabliſhing an abſolute authority. He could afford to maintain, and the ſtate of the kingdom would probably give him a pretext for maintaining, two or three hundred thouſand regular troops; an army that would be maſter of the lives and fortunes of all his ſubjects. The multitude of officers neceſſary for collecting this revenue, the great variety of magiſtrates requiſite for preventing diſorders in ſo extenſive a country, the great number of clergy, together with ſuch as were employed at the public expence for the inſtruction of youth, the numerous penſioners and placemen, unavoidable in ſo large an empire, and whom the Sovereign would be in a condition to ſupport; not to mention the ſtill greater number of expectants in each of theſe departments: all theſe, having a conſtant intereſt to attach themſelves to the fortunes of the Crown, would form ſuch a powerful body

of auxiliaries, as, with their ſeveral connections, would produce an implicit ſubmiſſion to every meaſure which the Monarch might be diſpoſed to enforce. In oppoſition to the wealth in the hands of the Crown, the property that could be accumulated by any number of individuals, united occaſionally for the defence of their privileges, would be little more than a drop in the bucket.

The wonderful increaſe of the public revenue of Britain, ſince the time of the Revolution, though partly owing to the increaſing wealth of the inhabitants, is at the ſame time derived, in a good meaſure, from the extenſion of her dominions, and from the greater number of people, who, in ſome ſhape or other, are ſubjected to the payment of her taxes. The loſs of America is to be conſidered, no doubt, as, in this reſpect, a great diminution of Britiſh ſubjects; ſince the inhabitants of that country, from our commercial intercourſe with them, and by the monoply which we enjoyed, were in reality contributers to our taxes. But notwithſtanding the reduction of the Britiſh empire in that quarter, there can be no doubt, if we conſider its dependancies in other parts of the globe, and more particularly the ſubjugation of India, that it has, upon the whole, been greatly augmented ſince the period above-mentioned; and the natural conſequences of this augmentation, by throwing greater weight into the ſcale of the executive

tive power, muſt be obvious upon the ſlighteſt reflection.

2. Another circumſtance, which of late has greatly contributed to increaſe the power of the Crown, is the effect of commerce, and of that opulence which is derived from it, in breaking down the old family connections, and in promoting a ſpirit of venality and corruption.

In thoſe times which immediately ſucceeded the Revolution, the nobility and great landed proprietors, though they had long been ſtript of that dangerous authority, which had produced a prevalence of ariſtocracy in the early periods of our government, were ſtill poſſeſſed of ſo much influence, as enabled them to collect and retain a number of faithful adherents, in ſupport of every meaſure in which they were warmly engaged. It was therefore not difficult, in many caſes, to form a powerful oppoſition, the members of which were not eaſily ſeduced by the Court, to deſert the ſtandard of their reſpective leaders. But the greater advancement of trade has, in a good meaſure, deſtroyed this hereditary influence, and has raiſed up to wealth and conſideration, a ſet of new men, without connections, and without any principle of union, but that which is directed by a regard to their own intereſt. Thus the great body of the people, though they have acquired, perhaps, more independance, and a higher ſpirit of liberty, are become

become leſs capable of proſecuting any joint meaſures for the ſupport of their privileges. They are like an army without ſubordination or diſcipline, incapable of availing themſelves of their own ſtrength, and eaſily put into diſorder, or cut in pieces, by the ſuperior ſkill of the enemy. Among a number of individuals, every one of which is proſecuting his own private views, the opportunities given to Miniſtry of breaking every oppoſition, by gaining thoſe perſons whoſe abilities or wealth have rendered them formidable, may eaſily be conceived. In confirmation of what has now been advanced, you will obſerve that the late elections have, in ſeveral places, exhibited a ſort of triumph of the inhabitants of towns, and of the ſmaller gentry, in oppoſition to what is uſually denominated the great landed intereſt of the country.

To this circumſtance, I am afraid, we may add, the progreſs of that mercenary ſpirit, which is the natural conſequence of great riches, acquired by gainful employments, and of that neceſſitous condition which is often produced by habits of diſſipation and extravagance. In former times, thoſe who aſpired to political conſideration were generally actuated by ambition, at leaſt, if not by motives of public virtue, and regarded pecuniary conſiderations as of inferior value. They were excited by their birth, by their education, and by a con-

a conſciouſneſs of their own dignity, to maintain a conſiſtency of conduct. They were often tenacious of party principles, of their ancient connections, and even of their own particular humours, opinions, and prejudices. How much the ſtate of the country has been changing in this reſpect, it would be ſuperfluous to remark. Your own obſervation will be ſufficient to convince you how univerſally the objects of ambition have been made ſubſervient to the ſordid purſuits of avarice, and with what ſteady ſagacity the deſire of gain is capable of perſevering on the trail even of petty emolument. It would be an invidious taſk to point at any recent occurrences, in order to ſhow how far the proſpect of Court favour is capable of altering public conduct, and of new modelling public opinions. I only mean to take notice of the advantages, which are thus obtained by Adminiſtration, for bearing down every obſtacle before it, and in carrying all its views into execution.

In a ſituation where the influence of the Crown is gradually advancing, from the natural courſe of things, we need not be ſurpriſed that many individuals ſhould find their account in profeſſing a warm zeal to promote its farther advancement; and ſhould be willing to aſſiſt in any meaſures that might be ſuggeſted for that purpoſe. It is not neceſſary to inform you that the promoting deſigns of this nature has been the uniform ſyſtem

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of the preſent reign. We have too much reaſon to believe that there are perſons who look upon the prerogative as too limited in this kingdom, and who think that there is no good reaſon, why it ſhould not be equally extended as in France, or in moſt of the other European monarchies. Theſe opinions have been ſometimes declared with ſufficient openneſs; though, on other occaſions, it is believed, they have been inſinuated in a more ſecret manner, in places where the poiſon was moſt likely to be attended with fatal conſequences. If the American war had been ſucceſsful, there can be no doubt that, by the great additional influence that would have reſulted to the Crown from the government of that country, the ſchemes of thoſe gentlemen would, in a ſhort time, and probably without much alarm or noiſe, have been fully accompliſhed. I am far from ſuppoſing, however, that every perſon who concurred in ſupporting the American war, or even ſome of thoſe who took a principal ſhare in it, had any the moſt remote concern in thoſe deſigns. The truth is, the American war was ſupported by a ſort of delirium, which appears to have pervaded all ranks of men; and it is only when we have recovered our ſenſes, and look back upon it from ſome diſtance, that we have become ſenſible of the folly of our conduct. The iſſue of that war, however, was not more favourable to the natural rights of mankind, than

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it was fortunate for the liberty of this kingdom. It occaſioned a total overthrow of thoſe political meaſures which had been proſecuted for ſome time, and it was the opinion of many that theſe would never be revived. For my own part, I acknowledge that I was led to entertain ſuch hopes. But that theſe were ill-founded, the event ſoon demonſtrated. The Miniſtry, which was formed upon Lord North's reſignation, had not been many months in office, before it became viſible that a powerful diviſion of the C—b—t had been induced to deſert the principles upon which they had riſen to popular favour, and to ſtudy the advancement of their own private intereſt, by fighting under the banner of prerogative. By the injudicious treaty of peace which they were conſtrained to patch up in a hurry, theſe new adherents of the Crown were again defeated, and were left in diſappointment and diſgrace. It is not ſurpriſing that they diſcovered on this occaſion the utmoſt virulence againſt the coalition; to which their mortification was principally owing. Nothing now remained for the party, but to call in their forces, and to lie in wait for ſome future opportunity of renewing their attack; and this, as we have ſeen already, was preſented to them, by Mr. Fox's India Bill in the following ſeſſion of Parliament. It ſeems to have been at firſt expected, that this bill, from the noiſe that was made

about its tendency to *increaſe* the power of the Crown, would be rejected in the Houſe of Commons; from which the Miniſtry would of courſe be overturned. But this having failed, a more deſperate meaſure became neceſſary; and the deſired event was with ſome difficulty produced, by the unconſtitutional interference of the Crown in the Houſe of Peers.

Even after the ſucceſs of this meaſure, a new Herculean labour was ſtill behind, in order to reap any benefit from the paſt. It was neceſſary to gain over, from the laſt miniſtry, the greateſt majority in the Houſe of Commons, which had ever, perhaps, ſupported any adminiſtration, in a queſtion of ſuch difficulty and importance. For accompliſhing this purpoſe, two reſolutions were taken; the nature and tendency of which deſerved to be examined with the utmoſt attention. The firſt was to endeavour, by every artifice, to excite, throughout the nation, a clamour againſt the former miniſtry, and to procure addreſſes in favour of the late change of adminiſtration. The ſecond, intended as a ſupplement to the former, was to diſſolve the Parliament.

With regard to the firſt of theſe meaſures, I ſhall not diſpute that caſes may occur which are ſufficient to juſtify an appeal, from the determinations of the Houſe of Commons, to the opinion of their Conſtituents, or of the nation at large. As all government

government is ultimately derived from the people, ſo it muſt be underſtood that the people have a right to controul the exerciſe of thoſe powers which they have committed to certain magiſtrates, or to certain claſſes and orders of men. But, on the other hand, it will certainly be admitted by every reaſonable perſon, that theſe ultimate appeals to the people ought never to be made but upon very extraordinary occaſions, nor without the moſt urgent neceſſity. The moſt important powers in the State are committed to the ſeveral branches of Parliament; and the Conſtitution knows no other way, but through them, of exerciſing thoſe powers. Whenever Parliament is prevented from that exerciſe, there is an immediate ſuſpenſion of all government. It is the duty of every member of Parliament to exerciſe the powers committed to him, according to his beſt judgment, and according to his conſcience.——Though he ought, no doubt, to have his mind open to information from every quarter, and in particular to liſten to the voice of his conſtituents, as that of men entitled to great deference and reſpect; yet the duty which he owes to the public, requires that he ſhould be ultimately directed by his own opinion. A member of the Houſe of Commons is not the repreſentative merely of the borough or county by which he is choſen; he is the repreſentative of the whole nation; and the voice of every county or borough in the kingdom is equally

entitled to his regard. The powers of government are committed to him, by the conſtitution, for the very purpoſe of avoiding that confuſion, that ignorance, that inconſiſtency, that endleſs delay, which would infallibly render the nation incapable of executing the moſt common buſineſs, if the people were to aſſemble and take into their own hands the regulation of public meaſures.

But if an appeal to the people ought, in all caſes, to be made with extreme caution, it is, moſt eſpecially, of a dangerous tendency when made upon the part of the Crown. It will not eſcape your obſervation, that the late application to the people for procuring addreſſes, in favour of Adminiſtration, and againſt the declared ſenſe of a great majority in the Houſe of Commons, is perhaps the firſt inſtance of the kind that occurs in our hiſtory. The complaints of the people, in former times, have been excited by a ſuppoſed union of Parliament with Miniſtry, and have proceeded from a jealouſy that the national repreſentatives were too much under the direction of the Court. If ever there happens to be juſt ground for ſuch an apprehenſion, if ever Parliament ſhould become ſo corrupted as to betray the rights of the people to the intereſt of the Crown, the whole nation muſt be convinced that there is a neceſſity for complaining. But there is no great danger that complaints, upon that account, will ever become

come too frequent, or that popular clamour will ever ariſe to any great pitch without ſufficient cauſe; for in ſuch a caſe, the complaints of the people will be checked and counteracted both by the operations in Court influence, and by that of the leading men in the nation.

The caſe is widely different, when the Houſe of Commons and the Crown are at variance, and when the former is maintaining a point of privilege, in oppoſition to a claim of prerogative by the latter. There it may happen that the clamours of the people ſhould be excited by mere artifice, and without any juſt foundation.

The danger of admitting the popular interference, when procured in ſuch a manner, muſt be obvious. In the courſe of any important debate in the Houſe of Commons, the weaker party is tempted to lay hold of every circumſtance calculated to ſupport a loſing cauſe. By joining their influence to that of the Crown, by application to thoſe boroughs, or parts of the country where they have the moſt immediate intereſt, and by ſoliciting that part of the inhabitants who happen to favour their own views, it will be no difficult matter to procure addreſſes, which, to thoſe at a diſtance, may appear to ſpeak the langnage of the people. If an experiment of this kind meets with encouragement in one inſtance, the example is likely to be followed in others; and different factions

tions will be inclined in their turn, to ſupport their own intereſt, by reſorting to the ſame expedient. The Crown was formerly accuſtomed to carry on the great national buſineſs, by procuring a majority in Parliament. That is, doubtleſs, a method ſtill. But another method will now be introduced, the peculiar invention of the preſent times; that of procuring a *minority*, by whoſe aſſiſtance, ſupported by ſuch addreſſes as can be obtained, the ſame end may probably be accompliſhed. When the Crown is thus doubly armed, it muſt be a ſtrong and obſtinate majority, indeed, that is capable of reſiſting the efforts of prerogative.

But the diſſolution of Parliament was the great reſource of the preſent Miniſtry, from which they promiſed themſelves the final accompliſhment of their purpoſes. From the time that they came into office, there can be no doubt that this meaſure was reſolved upon, in caſe it ſhould be found neceſſary; but it was delayed for ſome time, and kept in reſerve, for ſeveral very obvious reaſons. It was thought adviſeable to try every other expedient for procuring a majority in Parliament, before they hazarded a meaſure of ſuch a deſperate nature. In the mean time every art was practiſed, and every engine of corruption was employed, in order to gain or to intimidate thoſe perſons who diſapproved of their late proceedings. It was neceſſary, beſides, that matters

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ſhould be put into a proper train for the enſuing elections. Conſidering the ſtate of the Conſtitution, it required a courſe of proper evacuations, and alteratives, to prepare it for that violent operation which it was about to undergo. Some little time was neceſſary for this purpoſe; and in order that the other party might be prevented from likewiſe availing themſelves of this interval, it was requiſite that they ſhould be kept in ſuſpenſe, with reſpect to the future diſſolution. Intimation was accordingly given by the friends of the Miniſter, that he would not adviſe the diſſolution of Parliament; an anſwer, confirming the ſame idea with regard to the intention of Government, was delivered from the throne; the Miniſter afterwards gave more poſitive aſſurances to the ſame effect; and, notwithſtanding the earneſt and diligent canvaſſing of miniſterial candidates throughout the kingdom, the nation in general remained for ſeveral months in a ſtate of uncertainty, concerning the final intention of Adminiſtration. Thus, when the ſtroke was at laſt given, which put an end to that Parliament, the Miniſtry had already done every thing in their power to ſecure the character and complexion of its ſucceſſor.

That the power of diſſolving Parliament is a branch of the King's prerogative is indiſputable; though I believe, on the other hand, it will be acknowledged,

acknowledged, that an intention to diſſolve Parliament, merely becauſe the King could not procure a majority in the Houſe of Commons, has not been harboured by any Engliſh monarch from the Revolution to the preſent time. The right of calling the great national council was originally beſtowed upon the chief executive officer, becauſe, from his ſituation, he was the fitteſt perſon to judge when there was occaſion for its deliberations; and he had, of courſe, the right of diſſolving that aſſembly; which was nothing more, than the diſpenſing with its farther attendance. It was always underſtood, however, to be the duty of the Sovereign to call meetings of Parliament as often as the buſineſs of the nation required it; and it was never ſuppoſed that he would diſmiſs a Parliament, or refuſe to call that aſſembly, with a view of withholding public meaſures from its conſideration, or of diverting the exerciſe of its powers into a different channel.—The returning officer of a county, or of a borough, is entruſted, by the Conſtitution, with the power of returning the members of the Houſe of Commons for his diſtrict; but he is guilty of a manifeſt violation of his duty, if, in order to ſerve a job, he returns thoſe perſons, who, according to his beſt judgment, have not a majority of the legal electors. The branch of prerogative now under conſideration muſt be viewed in the ſame light;

light; and the Miniſtry are reſponſible, if it has been perverted to any purpoſes different from thoſe for which it was originally beſtowed.

That it has been ſo perverted, however, muſt be evident to the whole nation. Will any man pretend to ſay that the laſt Parliament was diſſolved, from the want of buſineſs requiring its determination? Is there any man ſo hardy as to affirm, that there were not meaſures of the higheſt national importance preſſing forward to the deliberation of Parliament, and which could not be delayed, without extreme inconvenience, and even without the hazard of a public convulſion. Did the Houſe of Commons ſhew any reluctance to carry on the national buſineſs; or did they not, on the contrary, demonſtrate the ſtrongeſt determination, in ſhort, to facilitate and promote every meaſure that might eſtabliſh public credit, and provide the neceſſary remedies for the various exigencies of the State? Is there any man, who does not believe that the laſt Parliament was diſſolved "merely becauſe the Miniſtry could not otherwiſe obtain a majority in the late Houſe of Commons," and for no other purpoſe than that of procuring, by miniſterial influence, a greater number of friends in the preſent one? Will it be ſeriouſly maintained, that a diſſolution of Parliament from ſuch motives, and for ſuch a purpoſe, is conſiſtent with the great ends for which the

Crown was entruſted with this diſcretionary power?

The conſequences, at the ſame time, of this meaſure appear to be pregnant with ſo much miſchief, as muſt excite the moſt painful apprehenſion in every man who is anxious to preſerve our happy Conſtitution.

To the Members of the Houſe of Commons a diſſolution of Parliament, at a time when the period of its natural expiration is at a conſiderable diſtance, muſt always be a ſerious matter. It was formerly the univerſal belief that our repreſentatives, however they might be tempted by the proſpect of Court favour, were in no danger of ſuffering any hardſhip from the diſpleaſure of the Crown. This point was thought to be abſolutely eſtabliſhed at the Revolution, when it was provided, that no perſon ſhould be called in queſtion in any other place for his opinions delivered in Parliament. But we muſt now be content to receive a different doctrine. We have now an example ſet before us, that the Houſe of Commons may be ſubjected to a very conſiderable puniſhment, if ever they ſhall perſiſt in meaſures which are diſagreeable to the Crown; they may be put to the expence of a new election, as well as incur the hazard of loſing their ſeats: and this puniſhment may be repeated as long as their obſtinacy continues. Without any diſparagement to

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that Houſe, for which I entertain the higheſt reſpect, it will require an uncommon exertion of public ſpirit in its members, to preſerve their ſteadineſs on ſuch occaſions, and to maintain their privileges, in oppoſition to the influence of the Crown, when backed by the terrors of an immediate diſolution. It will require, if poſſible, ſtill greater virtue in their conſtituents, and in the nation at large, to ſupport thoſe members who have rendered themſelves obnoxious to the Court, and notwithſtanding the whole weight of the Treaſury, and the various means of ſeduction, and of deluſion in the hands of Miniſtry and their numerous adherents, to return them once more into Parliament. Such virtue, I am afraid, can hardly be expected; and the effect of a diſſolution, at leaſt after one or two examples, will be ſuch as every Engliſhman, who conſiders the matter with attention, muſt tremble to think of.

There are many well meaning people who ſeem to think, that though a diſſolution of Parliament has been put in practice in the preſent caſe, it will not be extended to future occaſions. But I cannot ſee the leaſt colour for ſuch an opinion. Will not the ſame motives which have induced the Crown to hazard ſuch a ſtep at preſent, produce a ſecond experiment of the ſame kind, whenever there is a neceſſity for it, and whenever there

is any probability that it will be ſucceſsful? Will not every Miniſtry, in their own caſe, be judges of this neceſſity; and be diſpoſed to think, that the accompliſhment of the particular meaſures in which they are engaged, together with the preſervation of their places, are ſufficient reaſons for threatening a diſſolution of Parliament, and even for putting their threats in execution? But there is ground to believe, that this latter ſtep will, in a ſhort time, become ſuperfluous. It is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that the ſame members, who, by repeated ſtruggles, have found themſelves unable to keep their ſeats, without ruining their fortunes, will at length be diſpoſed to quit the conteſt, and retire into a private ſituation. There can be little doubt, that the moſt reſolute perſeverance will be finally ſubdued; and that the mere mention of diſſolution will, in the end, be ſufficient to overawe the firmeſt minds, and to produce an univerſal and implicit obedience.

You will eaſily ſee that the Crown is thus likely to acquire what alone was wanting to eſtabliſh an abſolute and unlimitted authority. It was formerly underſtood that the ordinary buſineſs of Parliament was pretty uniformly conducted by miniſtry; but we always expected that, in extraordinary caſes, the Houſe of Commons, at leaſt, would be able to make a ſtand, and give a check to ſuch meaſures as were extremely improper. We

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muſt now, I ſuſpect, if we have not virtue to reſiſt the eſtabliſhment of this ſyſtem, bid farewell to theſe expectations. By the arbitrary exertion of prerogative, in the diſſolution of Parliament, the Houſe of Commons, it is evident, will be rendered of no more conſequence in the government, than a mere Parliament of Paris, commanded by the King, whenever there is occaſion, to regiſter the royal edicts.

I beg leave to add, that in ſuch a ſtate, our preſerving the forms of liberty, will only aggravate our misfortune. Our government will not only become an abſolute monarchy, but probably an abſolute monarchy of the very worſt kind that can be eſtabliſhed in a civilized and poliſhed nation. In France, where the Legiſlative, as well as the executive power, is openly and directly exerciſed by the King, there is commonly little danger from the abuſes of his prerogative; becauſe the ſovereign and his miniſters are, in character and reputation at leaſt, reſponſible to the public. But whenever it happens, in any country, that the great powers of government are exerciſed *apparently* by a national council, but *really* and truly by the Crown, the King and his Miniſters muſt be under no ſuch reſtraint; but will be encouraged to practiſe meaſures of which they would otherwiſe be aſhamed, by the conſideration that they are ſcreened from the odium and reſentment

ment which their conduct is likely to excite. In a word the ſecret, and diſguiſed exerciſe of arbitrary power, as it is more likely to ariſe in this country, ſo it is of a much more dangerous and pernicious tendency than that which is open and avowed.—

Such is the melancholly view, which I am ſorry a regard to truth obliges me to lay before you, when you are juſt going to be initiated in public buſineſs. You are come to examine the reſult of that experiment which has been made upon the nation, and to diſcover whether it has been made with ſucceſs, and with ſafety to thoſe perſons who have had the direction of it. Upon the behaviour of this Parliament, and probably of this very ſeſſion, the fate of our government will depend. If the Houſe of Commons ſhall be diſpoſed to vindicate their privileges, and to ſhow a proper reſentment of the late meaſures reſpecting the diſſolution of Parliament, there may be ſtill a proſpect that the dangerous wound, which has been given to the Conſtitution, may be healed. If, on the contrary, they approve of thoſe proceedings, and diſcover a willingneſs to ſupport the deſigns of Miniſtry, the diſpute is over.

" Venit ſumma dies, et ineluctabile tempus
" Dardaniæ"——

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The knowledge I have of your political opinions, and the confidence I entertain that you are much above any private conſideration, which a Miniſter can hold out to you, leave me no doubt of your line of conduct on the preſent occaſion. There is one advantage, however, attending your preſent ſituation. To diſcern your duty is not difficult, though the faithful diſcharge of it is important. You may alſo be aſſured that, whatever miſrepreſentations are circulated by the tools of prerogative, every honeſt and intelligent man will approve of your conduct; and there is the ſtrongeſt reaſon to believe that, as the miſt of prejudice is every where beginning to be diſpelled, the voice of the nation will, in a ſhort time be unanimous in ſeconding your efforts.

As to particular queſtions which are likely to come before you, during the preſent ſeſſion, I confeſs that theſe appear to me of a more or leſs conſequence, according as they have an influence in fixing the great conſtitutional point which I have mentioned. I have ſome curioſity to ſee what ſort of India bill will be brought in by the Miniſter, after the two former bills have been thrown out, and after the public have acquired ſuch full information upon the ſubject. That it will be an effectual bill, for the protection of that unhappy country, I have not the leaſt expectation. Why ſhould thoſe men ſeek to reſtrain the

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deſpotical government of India, who are ſeeking to eſtabliſh a deſpotiſm at home? Why ſhould they endanger their places by encountering difficulties at a diſtance, when the ſucceſs of their operations depends evidently upon their avoiding any ſcrutiny of their actions, and lulling the nation in thoughtleſs ſecurity?

The reform of parliamentary repreſentation is another object, which is likely to excite attention and upon which great profeſſions have been made by the Gentleman who is now at the head of the Treaſury. He is now in a ſituation, in which his former promiſes might eaſily be fulfilled; and he may expect that the public will not fail to mark his behaviour. If a reform of parliamentary repreſentation was formerly conceived to be expedient, it muſt now appear abſolutely neceſſary, in order that the Houſe of Commons may be able to maintain its independance, againſt the arbitrary power of diſſolution exerciſed by the Crown. But, in order that this meaſure may correſpond to the views of the public, and be productive of thoſe advantages which are expected from it, it muſt be a real and a thorough reformation. It muſt endeavour to ſtrike at the root of the evil. It muſt not be confined to the addition of a few county-members; while the numerous repreſentatives, elected by inſignificant or by nominal and fictitious boroughs are permitted to

remain

remain in their former condition. To expect that the nation, in the preſent circumſtances would be contented with ſo ſlight an improvement, is to think that a hungry man will be ſatisfied with a mere *ſugar-plumb*. But it is needleſs to trouble you with conjecture about particulars which the delay of a few weeks will bring clearly to light. I ſhall therefore put an end to this long letter by aſſuring you, that

I am, &c.

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